

The New Town Crier



Official Newsletter Of The Historical Society Of Bloomfield

Editor: Frederick Branch • Design: Mark Scurman

VOLUME TWO, NUMBER SEVEN

BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY, 07003

MAY, 2003

MEETING

MONDAY MAY 19 • 7:30PM
AT THE CIVIC CENTER
84 Broad Street • Bloomfield

MARTHA WASHINGTON Our First First Lady

Once again the Historical Society of Bloomfield is sponsoring an historical interpretation from the American Historical Theatre for its May 19th general meeting at the Bloomfield Civic Center.

Martha Washington will be interpreted by Pat Jordan, an accomplished singer with a B.A., in Theater from Villanova and voice training at Julliard Opera Workshop. Added to her acting and singing abilities is her strong interest in history. She has mastered the characters



Pat Jordan will interpret Martha Washington in Mays Meeting.

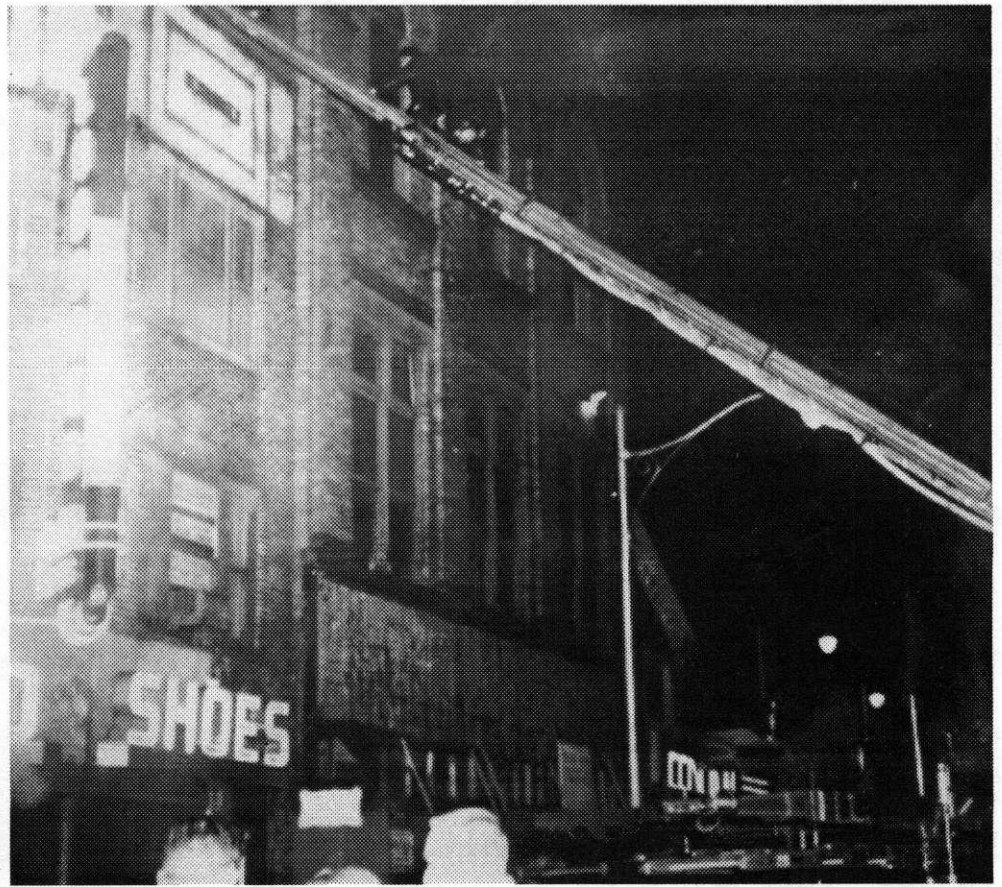
of Betsy Ross, Amelia Earhart, and Martha Washington, teaches acting to young people, and appeared in films and commercials. She has an extensive wardrobe of costumes and worked with the American Historical Theatre for about ten years.

Although widow Martha Custis brought great wealth to George Washington through their marriage in 1759, perhaps the most precious gifts she brought to the marriage were her children, Jackey and Patsey, for that marriage would otherwise have been childless. So it was a great blow to both when Patsey died in childhood. Jack Custis accompanied his stepfather during many campaigns in the Revolution and died of fever during the siege of Yorktown. Martha and George adopted Jack's two children, Eleanor, 3, and G.W. Parke Custis, a baby of a few months. The children grew up at Mt. Vernon.

Martha Washington played many roles besides that of mother. This program, developed by the American Historical Theatre, will tell us about them through Pat Jordan's historical interpretation.

This is a free program, open to the public. It will take place at the Civic Center, 84 Broad Street, in Bloomfield, at 7:30 p.m. sharp, on May 19, a Monday.

This Horizon Speakers Bureau program is offered by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



A HOT TIME IN THE CENTER

In August of 1892, The Harris Brothers, proprietors of "The Bloomfield Beehive", announced plans for a modern brick building to be built at The Center. (See page 28 of the Arcadia Book "Images of America: Bloomfield") It was planned as a three story structure, 40 feet wide and 200 feet deep. The first floor was originally divided into two stores, one of them occupied by the Harris Brothers, the other by Nathan Russell, Real Estate, and the source of many of our historic photographs.

This impressive building stood on Washington Street directly opposite the end of Broad Street and was visible from as far away as the Public Library. The construction was substantial, consisting of yellow Roman brick with ornate brown terra cotta moldings and details. Three arches supported an elaborate pressed metal cornice and a decorative balustrade, with the legend "Central Building" in a cartouche over the center arch. A special feature was the public hall on the second floor. It was described as seating 600 people, but boasted that "under pressure, 1,000 people will be able to get in." Fortunately, the hall had long been abandoned when the building met its fate.

In December of 1978, a general alarm fire wrecked the Central Building. More than 70 firefighters from Bloomfield, Glen Ridge, East Orange, and Newark battled the blaze, which sent billowing clouds of black smoke over the Center. Tenants of the building included the Federal Shoe Store on the first floor and Beneficial Finance on the second. The high point for the spectators came when Beneficial's safe crashed through the shoe

store and into the basement.

Although the very old frame building on the corner of Washington Street and Glenwood was saved, it, too, became a casualty of carelessness when an overheated coffee maker set it on fire a few years later, destroying Wise Opticians, a delicatessen and several other businesses as well.

The following day, a strange sight appeared in front of the ruins: hundreds of single shoes, thoroughly soaked, scattered all over the pavement. (It is said that several prominent citizens were seen holding one shoe in their size and diligently searching the pavement for its mate.) Among those present included HSOB Members Dorothy Johnson, (who took many photographs), John Gibson, and your editor.

This photograph, from the files of the Bloomfield Fire Department, was given to the editor by retired Captain John Corona.

ATTENTION

Follow your best intentions –

PLEASE PAY YOUR DUES NOW

Continue to support the Society and remain on the mailing list for the Newsletter with notices of meetings.

We thank all who have paid promptly – and are waiting to thank tardy payers!



PEDESTRIANS BEWARE!!!

Here are some of the General Electric Company Payroll Department girls on a thrilling joyride in Newark in the late 1940's. They are, left to right, back row: Natalie Sheyka, Edith Cool, and Francis (last name unknown). Front row: Marty Karpowitz, Rose Trotta, and Marion Higgins.

The General Electric Company was located at 5 Lawrence Street from 1898 (when it was founded as Sprague Electric) until it moved to Texas in 1959. Although the buildings still stand on the site of the Noll Dairy farm, they are occupied by a variety of small companies. More about this Bloomfield Industry in a future issue. (Many thanks to Marty Karpowitz for identifying her G.E. co-workers).

WESTINGHOUSE PARKING LOT

We are standing at the eastern boundary of what was the Noll Dairy Farm. The Noll homestead stood at 74 Arlington Avenue until 1929, when it was demolished to make a parking lot (the first of three) for G.E. employees. The brick building in the far distance, a six-story structure of which only the two top floors are visible, was built in 1914 for General Electric at 5 Lawrence Street. It marks the western boundary of the Noll Farm.

When the Passaic-Bergen Lumber Company on Lawrence Street burned, their property was acquired by G.E. for a much larger parking facility, and this one sold to Westinghouse. The sign, photographed in May of 2000 and now gone, was the last remnant of the Westinghouse operation in Bloomfield.

The Noll Farm had been divided into two parts in 1856 by The Newark and Bloomfield Railroad (later part of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western system). The Watchung Railroad (later the Orange Branch of the New York and Greenwood Lake Railroad (Erie)) formed the northern boundary of the Noll Farm, making it an ideal site for industrial use. The Sprague Electric Motor Company located there before 1900, later merging with the General Electric Company to manufacture motors, industrial controls, and, later on, air conditioners. General Electric's Air Wall heating system and heat pump (later called the Weathertron) were both developed by engineers at this plant. The company relocated to Texas in 1959.



This parking lot is now the site of a truck junkyard.

IN MEMORIAM

MARGARET SHERLOCK, a Charter Member of the Historical Society, died on March 8. She was a lifelong resident of Bloomfield and had been a Regent of the Bloomfield Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, an Elder and Trustee at the Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on The Green, and a founding trustee and treasurer of the Bloomfield's Oakeside Cultural Center. A graduate of Bloomfield High School and St. Laurence University, she was a research chemist at Schering Plough Laboratories for 42 years. Her name appears on more than 100 patents, including as a primary inventor of famous chemical compounds commonly known as Chlor-Trimeton (a popular antihistamine) and Banamine (a widely-used veterinary medication). A surviving niece and grandnephews and grandnieces were represented at her memorial service. Hers was a purposeful life dedicated to science, family, friends and community.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE MAY, 2003

One of the most valuable sources of information to anyone involved with historic research is an old map, which shows what amounts to an aerial view, taken long before Orville and Wilbur were born, of communities such as Bloomfield. Using maps of various dates, it is possible to determine the time of construction of any building within a few years by the date of the map on which it first appears. Fortunately, the Historical Society of Bloomfield and the Bloomfield Library Reference Department have preserved these important documents for the following years: 1856, 1865, 1871, 1888, 1906, and 1932. In addition, the Museum has purchased an atlas of the 1940's published by the New Jersey Highway Department, showing the properties condemned by them north of Belleville Avenue for the construction of the Garden State Parkway. Fred Branch frequently uses these maps for research and provided me with the facts presented here.

—Ina Campbell, President

ENJOY OUR MUSEUM

Located above the Children's Library at 90 Broad Street.

HOURS:

Wednesday from 2:00 to 4:30pm all year.

Saturday from 10:00am to 12:30pm September to mid-June and by appointment (973) 743-8844.

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Dues: Individual \$7.00, Couple \$10.00

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Please send check, payable to "The Historical Society of Bloomfield", along with your name, address, and telephone number to:

Membership Chairman

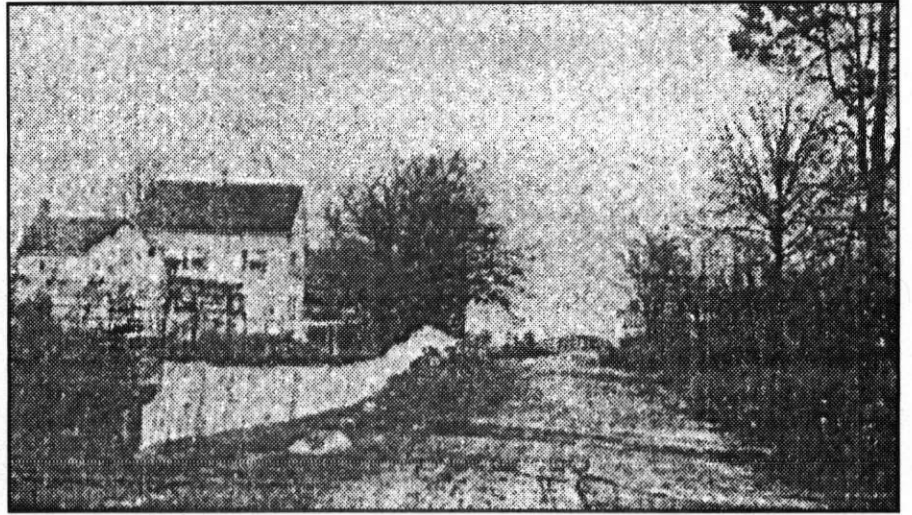
Historical Society of Bloomfield, 90 Broad Street, Bloomfield, New Jersey 07003

NOLL'S FARM

Noll's farm was established in 1847 by Michael Noll on the site of what was Bloomfield's industrial center (until the loss of General Electric in 1959 and the later razing of the sprawling Westinghouse plant). Michael's great-grandson, Valentine Noll, who still owned the property in Watsessing until the late 1920's, sold his land for commercial purposes, moving to Clifton, where he was still in business a generation later.

Although this publication would prefer to reproduce previously unpublished photographs, the original of the this photo has long disappeared and this may be the only copy we will ever see. It appeared in the *Independent Press* in 1958 with the following caption:

"At the turn of the century (1900) you might have found yourself hiking along this dirt road (now Arlington Avenue) to get a pail of milk from Joseph Nolls (sic), the owner of what was

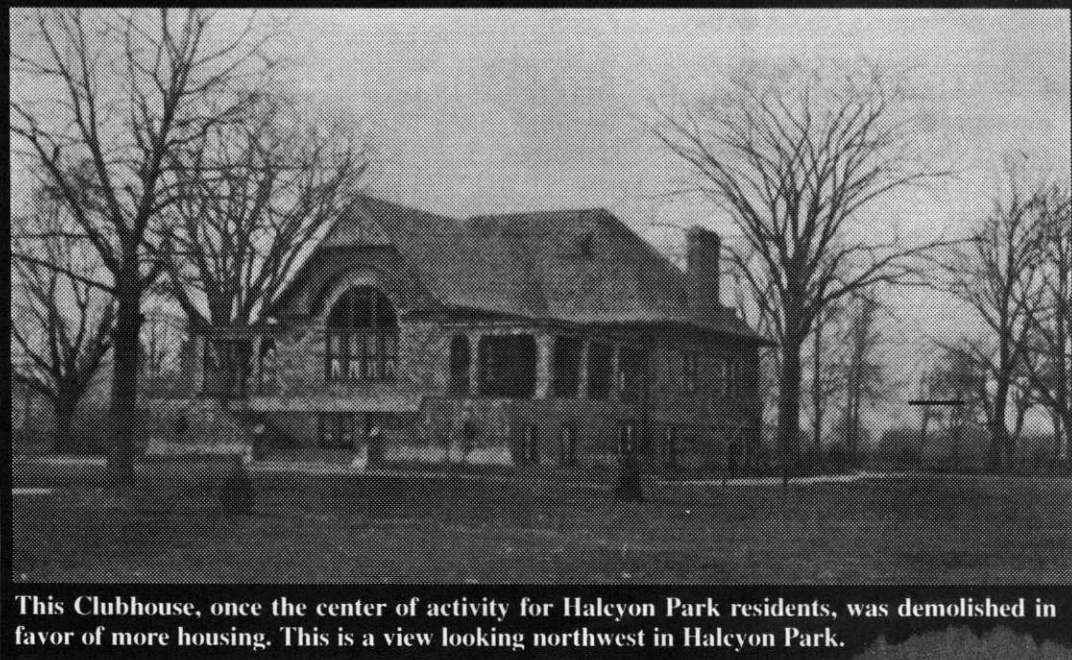


then Bloomfield's, oldest dairy. On the left you see the Noll home- stead, built during the middle of the nineteenth century. Today the Westinghouse employee parking lot occupies the site.



This large photograph ca. 1931 is of the new "parking field" of the General Electric Company, which can be seen in the background. At the upper left side are the abandoned buildings of the Noll Dairy Farm, which were demolished shortly thereafter. Arlington Avenue runs from left to right just below the center of the photograph; the Orange Branch of the Erie Railroad forms the lower right boundary of the "Parking Field."

FROM THE FILES: BLOOMFIELD LOOKING BACK



This Clubhouse, once the center of activity for Halcyon Park residents, was demolished in favor of more housing. This is a view looking northwest in Halcyon Park.

Did You Know...

Although there is no hint in the appearance of the building, Bloomfield High School was constructed in stages on several dates. The Belleville Avenue side, for example, is one-third 1911 and two-thirds 1920. For almost ten years, the auditorium projected from the State Street side and there were windows from the front section facing west until the building was enlarged.

There are firemen marching in the 1912 Centennial Parade carrying bunches of flowers. When asked if the men would be willing to do the same today, the answer was an emphatic negative.

Did You Know...

The founding of the Bloomfield Fire Department dates from 1883, when a disastrous fire leveled much of Bloomfield's Business District. Beginning at the Archdeacon Hotel at the corner of Washington Street and Bloomfield Avenue, it spread as far north as Rueben Dodd's Livery Stable on the site of today's Provident Bank. Help arrived (from Newark) too late to do much good, and it was realized that the town needed a permanent fire headquarters.



General Joseph Bloomfield
THE NEW TOWN CRIER
 THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
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 90 Broad Street
 Bloomfield, NJ 07003

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THE WELCOME MAT

A cordial welcome is extended to the following new members of The Historical Society of Bloomfield. We hope you will take note of our many activities and participate in any that you may choose.

Eleanor and Peter Boyne
 Springfield, Virginia
Margaret S. Lord
 Bloomfield

E-mail The Historical Society of Bloomfield at:
 BloomfHist@aol.com
 or call us at: 973-743-8844

THE UNPUBLISHED MORRIS CANAL



There were, no doubt, hundreds if not thousands of photographs taken of the Morris Canal from the invention of photography shortly after the canal was completed until its abandonment in 1924, and even after. Many of these have been published in books of Morris Canal photographs, but, once in awhile, a hitherto unknown snapshot crops up. Here is one of them.

We are looking north from the site of the lock at Montgomery Street around 1948. At the left margin is a barn which, no doubt, dated from the heyday of the canal, but was used as the headquarters of a riding academy when this photo was taken. Pedestrians walking along the canal towpath from Belleville Avenue to Montgomery Street were not surprised to see hoof prints in the dust inasmuch as patrons of the academy used to ride their horses from Wright's Field to the still rural area north of Bay Avenue. Far in the middle distance can be seen

the Liberty Street bridge over the canal bed, stores, and a house to our left.

This same scene was painted by Bloomfield artist, Charles Warren Eaton, in the early years of the last century, when the canal was still in operation. In place of the later steel bridge there is one made of timber, with the familiar truss common to many canal bridges in this area.

It is impossible to photograph this scene today. In 1952, the Garden State Parkway came through this peaceful area, making so many changes that there is absolutely nothing remaining from either the snapshot or the painting.

PHOTO BY FREDERICK BRANCH

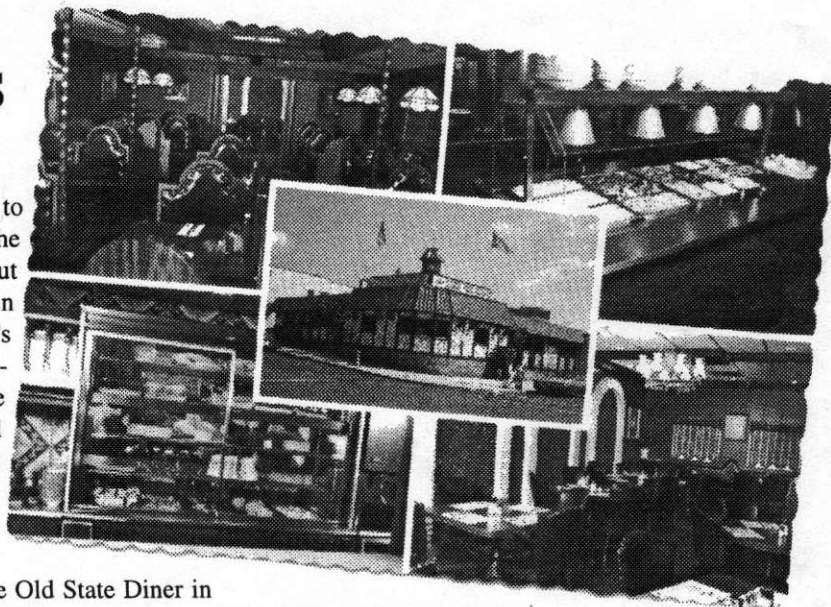
WILLIE'S DINER

This fact seems to have fallen into the cracks of history, but when it opened in April 1954, Willie's Diner was considered to be the largest in the world – and right here in Bloomfield, New Jersey, too!

As reported in the article about the Old State Diner in our November issue, the original wasn't much larger than a wooden trolley car. In fact, it may well have been an obsolete horsecar with the wheels removed and tables, chairs, and a counter installed. It sat on a small slice of land that had once been part of the backyard of the old Baldwin house at 272 State Street. Now the house is long gone and the diner covers the entire corner.

The new diner of 1954 was built by the Fodero Dining Car Company of Arlington Avenue, also in Bloomfield. It was constructed in sections which were trucked to the site and assembled there. The Fodero family were an old-time Bloomfield family. Pasquale ("Patsy") Fodero and his sister, Clara, were in Fairview School in the 1930's, along with your editor. Now the Fodero Dining Car building has been put to other uses and Arlington Avenue isn't what it used to be.

The diner was owned by William Raimondo, who started in business way back in 1915, hence the change of "State Diner" to "Willie's". It still dominates the corner of State and Liberty Streets, but does it remain the largest in the world?



TELEPHONE CONNECTION

The Historical Society of Bloomfield Museum now has a direct line for outside calls. The number is: (973) 743-8844.

To speak to a "real" person, call when the museum is open— Wednesday 2-4:30 pm all year, and Saturday 10am-12:30pm from September to mid-June.

At all other times, a message will be taken by General Joseph Bloomfield, James Newbegin Jarvie, Abigail Baldwin Oakes, or whichever posthumous shade is available on the answering machine.

Did You Know...

A long forgotten landmark was quietly demolished to build the large store which housed Rickel's Building Supply until recently. Known as The International Arms and Fuze Company, it produced arms and ammunition for World War One. The building was later occupied by Star Electric Company and Charms Candy Company.